

# From ground zero: Media coverage of COVID-19

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# Making sense of the crisis in Indian newsrooms during COVID19

# Motivations

1. Skepticism: Is COVID19 an existential moment for the news media (in India), as the UNESCO has described?
2. Curiosity: What are impacts of COVID19 on journalists, the practice of journalism and the news media ecology?
3. Opportunity: News media in India does not report on itself.

# News@COVID19

1. An independent blog on Medium,
2. Tracking layoffs and cutbacks in Indian newsrooms,
3. Tracking journalists who have succumbed to COVID19,
4. Documenting internal communications of news organisations,
5. Documenting changes in the business and practice of journalism,
6. This is a work in progress.

# Methodology

1. Collect publicly available information in the form of announcements made by news organisations themselves, news reports, etc.,
2. Circulate a survey form,
3. Collect internal communications,
4. Speak with stakeholders--journalists, newspaper vendors, CEOs, advertisers, businesses heads, union leaders, PR professionals, etc.,
5. Verify information by ensuring at least three independent confirmations.

# Details:

## Tracking layoffs and cutbacks

Began on 14 April,

Online survey on 17 April,

Entries	81
Survey responses,	44
Newsroom emails	15
Public announcements	10

# Gaps:

## Tracking layoffs and cutbacks

1. Not exhaustive,
2. Regional language news media,
3. Lack of official communication,
4. Exact number of journalists affected,



# Context:

## Political-economy of news in India

1. News market in India is distorted. News operations are not businesses,
2. Owners with political links control a sizable share of viewership/readership
3. Influence > Revenue
4. There are no financial incentives in India to innovate or engage in journalism,
5. Revenues are advertising based. TV news makes more money than newspapers. Digital is a loss center,
6. Unethical commercial practices plague the industry
7. No one reports on news media and communication technologies in India

# Findings:

## Tracking layoffs and cutbacks

Closures at: 9

Layoffs at: 23

Furloughs at: Two

Salary cuts at: Almost every news org

Shutting down of bureaus at: Four

Suspension of print editions at: 7

Limitation: Data mostly restricted to English language news orgs

# Findings:

## Tracking layoffs and cutbacks

1. At least 1,000 Indian journalists have lost their jobs. This is a conservative estimate based on the survey findings,
2. Journalists are working without any labour protection,
3. No paper trail, journalists being threatened to resign batches: Today, three at Outlook (30 since June), eight at The Indian Express (30 since 23 June),
4. Death of newsroom diversity. The impact is disproportionate on women journalists, journalists of minority religions and lower caste journalists
5. Death of district journalism, sports journalism, features journalism
6. Seasonal stories are being ignored,
7. Journalists are upskilling, collaborating.

# Context:

## Tracking layoffs and cutbacks

This is the fourth wave of layoffs in across newsrooms in the last decade. It is different this time because it:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Global structural collapse,                        | 4. Is just the beginning of what is to follow in the coming months |
| 2. Impacts all forms of media and media organisations | 5. Jobs are not returning  |
| 2. Will be a longer period of flux                    |  |

# Emerging trends:

1. More informalisation of the profession
2. Digitisation, accelerated death of print
3. Death of ground reporting,
4. More demanding KPIs for journalists
5. Worsening mental health of journalists
6. Worsening news deserts: Death of the district reporter

# What next

1. More layoffs and closures,
2. Worsening information inequality, polarisation: fall out of pay-for-news model
3. Changing media models, cooperatives, collectives, verticalization,
4. Greater fragmentation of the market,
5. Mainstream news media will continue to command influence,
6. Vacuum for journalism (Journalism  $\subseteq$  News).

# Relevant links

Tracking layoffs and cutbacks:

[bit.ly/newsatcovid19](https://bit.ly/newsatcovid19)

Journalists who succumbed to COVID19:

[bit.ly/journalistsatcovid19](https://bit.ly/journalistsatcovid19)

Changes to the practice and of business of journalism:

WIP

Survey form:

[bit.ly/newsatcovid19survey](https://bit.ly/newsatcovid19survey)

# Get in touch

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